2 Structural Bottlenecks to Democracy

The general consensus on Sub-Saharan Africa, regardless of paradigmatic orientation, is that African soil has been infertile for democracy. Although this deduction is slowly losing ground with the impact of the third wave of democratization on Africa, sceptics remain as to the structural compatibility of democracy (defined narrowly as multiparty and Western-style) and African society. Several factors can be attributed to this situation. The political reasons focus on factors such as the lack of a democratic political culture based on compromise and conflict resolution through dialogue (Almond and Verba, 1963), neopatrimonialism and the parasitic and exploitative role of the political élite (Hyden, 1983; Sandbrook, 1985), the lack of an élite consensus, and the predominant role of the military. These political factors spillover into the social and economic realm as well.

The socio-economic reasons focus on the lack of social requisites for development, including low levels of literacy, economic growth, the lack of a productive bourgeoisie (Moore, Jr., 1966) and the lack of an organized urban working class. These factors combined with the weak development of civil society vis-à-vis the state, have not provided fertile ground for the implantation of democracy.

Although Uganda may be an extreme case of state collapse, chaos and now renewal, it serves as a useful case study of the merging of several of these structural factors to undermine the establishment of democracy. The chaos and collapse that characterized Uganda for most of its post-colonial history was not inevitable. At Independence, Uganda was considered one of the more hopeful cases for development and democracy. So what happened? This chapter focuses on the historical and structural impediments to the formation of a democratic polity and society. These include the colonial legacy, the politicization of ethnicity, regionalism and religion by a parasitic political élite, the weak development of political parties, and the militarization and brutalization of society and politics. The post-colonial environment from 1962 to 1986, in general, was not conducive to the growth of a democratic civil society or civic culture because of state repression and control.

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by key social actors, and the general level of violence which under­
mined political and economic stability as well as national unity.

Of the 31 years of Ugandan independence, over 20 years have been
fraught with civil war and political instability. The one-time Pearl
of Africa has become synonymous with anarchy, violence and death.
From parliamentary democracy to extreme state terrorism, to a new
participatory, grassroots political system based on a Local Council
(LC) system, Uganda since independence in 1962 has experienced nine
radical regime transformations. It has experimented with multi­
partyism, single-party systems and no-party rule and has had its share
of sultanist rulers, masters of manipulation, and benevolent dicta­
tors. Given this historical legacy, it is not surprising that Uganda has
not developed an autonomous and democratic civil society.

THE COLONIAL LEGACY

At independence in 1962, the Ugandan economy was flourishing and
was considered one of the strongest in Black Africa (Kanyeihamba,
1989, p. 76). It was also one of the most agriculturally fertile, econom­
ically prosperous and literate countries in Africa. However, the former
British Protectorate was also divided by ethnicity, political factional­
ism and regionalism. One of the major sources of this initial instability
and strife was the legacy of colonialism itself.

In the pre-colonial era, four major, often rival, centralized states
controlled most of the area in Southern Uganda: the kingdoms of
Buganda, Ankole, Bunyoro and Toro. With the imposition of colon­
ial rule, the British administration took control over the area now
called Uganda and created an heterogeneous state populated by cul­
tural, linguistic and ethnically diverse peoples. The less-developed
North, regarded as a labour and army reserve, was starkly contrasted
to the export-commodity producing areas in the South and central

The British, operating an indirect-rule colonial administration, used
the Baganda chiefs as their colonial middle-men and bureaucrats. This
British colonial policy of preferential treatment toward the Baganda,
the largest ethnic group, enhanced and promoted uneven development
between the different regions and kingdoms (Kannyo, 1987, p. 387),
thereby conditioning Ugandans to think along ethnic lines (Kasfir,
1976, p. 113). A direct offspring of this was an entrenchment of ethnic
animosity and rivalry defined along religious and regional lines, par-